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U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO DISCUSS EAST TIMOR

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OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. HALL of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, this week the U.N. Human Rights Commission will be in session. During the course of its deliberations, it is expected that it will address the issue of human rights in East Timor.

A large number of my colleagues in both the House and the Senate have had a sustained interest in the plight of the people of East Timor, the former Portuguese colony which was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. Most experts believe that a minimum of 100,000 Timorese perished as a result of the Indonesian invasion and subsequent occupation.

While some improvements for the people of East Timor have been noted in recent years, there is little doubt that serious problems persist and need to be addressed. Consistently disturbing reports from respected organizations like Amnesty International, the United States Catholic Conference, Asia Watch, and a variety of other credible sources underscore the need for action to end the suffering of the Timorese people and to bring a lasting peace to the island territory.

In the 99th Congress, 136 of my colleagues joined me as cosponsors of the resolution I introduced which called for a wide range of measures regarding East Timor. Given the ongoing international concerns about the well-being of the people of East Timor, I intend to renew this initiative in the near future.

At this time, the most immediate focal point for action to help the Timorese people is the U.N. Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva. I urge all members of the U.N. Commission to adopt a resolution that will respond to the suffering of the people of East Timor. Human rights violations and grievances are a reality in East Timor, and the U.N. Human Rights Commission is an appropriate forum for their consideration.

Portugal, a nation with a long historical obligation to East Timor, now sits on the U.N. Commission. It is the hope of many in the U.S. Congress that Portugal will take advantage of its position to gather the Commission's support for measures that will lead to an improvement in human rights for the Timorese people.

The tragedy of East Timor will be compounded if the U.N. Human Rights Commission fails to endorse human rights for the Timorese people on this occasion.

Mr. Speaker, in order to update my colleagues on human rights conditions in East Timor, an article from the Boston Globe of December 13, 1987, follows:

[From the Boston Globe, Dec. 13, 1987]

A "HIDDEN HOLOCAUST" IN THE PACIFIC

(By Richard H. Stewart)

It has been called the "hidden holocaust," so far removed from the world's consciousness that only a handful of people are aware of the tragic events that have ravaged the population of the little-known Pacific island of East Timor.

It has been estimated that as many as 200,000 people out of a population of nearly 700,000 have perished from violence, starvation and disease since the 1975 invasion by troops of Indonesian dictator General Suharto.

Based on a population comparison, this would be comparable to 36 million deaths in the United States.

International human-rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Asia Watch as well as a coalition of international church groups have provided reports of the brutality inflicted on the Timorese by Indonesian forces, including summary executions, beheadings, torture, imprisonment without trial and the use of civilians as human walls in front of Indonesian troops battling guerrilla forces.

Some civilians who have "disappeared" from their villages have been reported by several independent sources to have been dropped to their deaths from helicopters. There have been reports of a photograph in an Indonesian newspaper showing Indonesian soldiers holding up the heads of their Timorese victims.

Exact death tolls can only be estimated because the Indonesians have virtually shut off the island to access by outsiders. But sources with contacts in East Timor insist the reports of inhuman treatment by the Indonesians are not exaggerated.

THE STAGGERING STATISTICS

The International Committee of the Red Cross has been able to provide food and medical aid to limited parts of the island and is the only humanitarian organization allowed access to the island, even on a restricted basis.

Some evidence of the human suffering can be surmised from the report in 1985 of East Timor Gov. Mario Carrascalao, who said that 100,000 East Timorese had died since 1975 and the island had 20,000 orphans, 13,000 widows and 8,000 crippled or maimed.

The 12-year agony of the Timorese began Dec. 7, 1975, when Indonesian troops invaded the island under the guise of preventing a communist takeover. They claimed that the East Timorese had sought integration with Indonesia.

According to Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Noam Chomsky, President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had advance knowledge of the invasion and authorized it. More than 90 percent of the invading troops carried American weapons, Chomsky has written.

In the aftermath of the invasion, the United States protested its illegality by announcing an embargo on the sending of American weapons to Indonesia. The embargo was nothing more than a political smokescreen. Professor Benedict Anderson of Cornell University, an Asia expert, discovered from a Pentagon report that the flow of arms to Indonesia had never been halted.

Prior to 1975, East Timor had been under Portuguese rule for 400 years, but the Portuguese government had all but abandoned the island in the wake of domestic political problems at home, leaving it vulnerable to Indonesian expansionist interests.

Ten days before the invasion, the East Timorese declared themselves independent from Portugal under the rule of a political party known as The Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor, which became better known as Fretilin.

To counter Indonesian forces, Fretilin leaders formed an armed guerrilla force, which has harassed the Indonesian military ever since.

Most recent estimates are that nearly two-thirds of the island, about the size of New Jersey, still has not been secured by Indonesian troops.

Last August, 40 US senators protested conditions in East Timor and wrote to Secretary of State George Shultz that Indonesian forces were engaged in "a renewed offensive" against Timorese insurgents. Similar protests have been lodged by 144 members of Congress.

A former apostolic administrator (the Catholic diocese is being administered from the Vatican rather than from Indonesia) from 1977 to 1983, Msgr. Martino da Costa Lopes, outlined the conditions of the population in a private letter last year:

"In the interior, in many villages and concentration camps, the people lack the conditions of life to enable them to survive as a people . . . the people live in a state of permanent encirclement. They are not allowed to go more than three kilometers outside their villages. In addition, they always have to have a 'pass' issued by the Indonesian military authorities.

"It happens easily that East Timorese are accused of having contact with the guerrillas and then they become victims of torture, massacres, etc."

Msgr. Costa Lopes has testified that, when foreign visitors requested a meeting with him at his East Timor home, his home was first searched and Indonesian intelligence officers were often present during the discussions.

East Timor is predominantly Catholic. Indonesia is a Moslem nation.

CONDITIONS IN EAST TIMOR

Sources recently in contact with East Timor offer this picture of current conditions there:

A knock on the door is enough to make people afraid. Homes are raided and searched. People suspected of sympathizing with or supporting the guerrillas are arrested, often at night. People are afraid to be seen talking in groups.

It is illegal to listen to foreign broadcasts. People are arrested for having aerials. When foreign broadcasts do refer to East Timor, military vehicles tour the capital city of Dili with loudspeakers denouncing the broadcasts as lies.

Most jobs and places in schools go to Indonesians who have been moved into the island. Indonesian culture and language is being forced on the Timorese.

On the rare occasions when foreigners are allowed to visit, they are restricted in their movement, Indonesian soldiers are dressed in civilian clothes, and military vehicles are taken off the streets.

When foreign journalists visited the [illegible]nd during Indonesian elections in April, people were forced to take part in pro-Indonesian demonstrations. Even the prison population was released to swell the ranks of the demonstrators.

People who did not vote could not get identification cards, which are required for jobs and other means of survival.

Prisoners are held in secret prisons, which the Red Cross is not allowed to visit. Prisoners are beaten and tortured and some have been murdered.

Restrictions on movement make it difficult to grow crops, and severe malnutrition has resulted in some rural areas. Indonesia has taken control of the lucrative coffee crop.

Food shipped in from Indonesia is too expensive for many of the Timorese. There is a high mortality rate for children up to age 5.

Indonesia has instituted a highly-active birth-control program, particularly in the interior, where guerrillas are most active, using Deprovera, a vaccine banned in most Western countries. The birth-control program is financed by the World Bank. Some [illegible]n and women have been sterilized with[illegible]t their knowledge during medical treatment.

Medicines are so scarce that hospitals have a shortage. Medicines are also so expensive that much of the indigenous population can't afford them. Birth control is free.

The current apostolic administrator, Msgr. Carlos Zimenes Belos, is under close military scrutiny. Military vehicles are frequently positioned outside his home.

Although the United Nations General Assembly condemned the Indonesian invasion soon after it occurred, 38 nations, including the United States, abstained. The resolution has been reaffirmed annually through 1982 but with dwindling support.

Indonesia's anticommunist government, its oil resources and strategic location between the Pacific and Indian oceans give it considerable international clout.

Portugal has neither the political will nor the military power to challenge the Indonesians, although there have been talks between the two nations.

A source in Lisbon said, "Indonesia feels it can keep protests at a lower level and avoid political embarrassment by agreeing to talks and making them drag on for as long as possible."